

By Don Corrigan, South County Times
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U.S. Rep. Russ Carnahan, D-St. Louis, whose district covers much of the Times area, gained added stature in the U.S. Congress this month with promotion to head of the House Subcommittee on Foreign Affairs.

Foreign Affairs will keep the 3rd District Congressman occupied with terror concerns, wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, but Carnahan's agenda will also include global education issues. Area educators are excited with the prospect of having a global connection in the nation's capital.

"It's always a plus to have your area congressman immersed in global affairs and global education," said Cindy Epperson, the international partnerships coordinator at St. Louis Community College at Meramec in Kirkwood.

"We live in a world where an insular attitude and world view are damaging to both citizens and governments," added Epperson, who also serves as an associate professor of sociology at Meramec.

Webster University in Webster Groves has had a relationship with the St. Louis congressional delegation for years. Legislators have helped the university grow in international status with campuses in London, Geneva, Vienna, Leiden in the Netherlands and in China.

"The St. Louis region's future is tied to playing a greater role in the world economy," explained Neil J. George, chancellor of Webster University. "Rep. Carnahan's world view is consistent with Webster's mission to prepare students for global citizenship.

"The St. Louis region's ongoing initiative to host a Midwest/China hub in the U.S. is one example of the importance of having our own Congressman chair a strategic sub-committee on foreign affairs," added George. "Webster was the first U.S. University to have an American accredited, Chinese approved, MBA program in Shanghai."

In his new position, Carnahan will have oversight over international travel promotion, global intellectual property protection, international education, visa policy, and farm and food aid from U.S. producers in the global food crisis - programs that can have a direct impact on jobs and the economy in Missouri.

Horrific Stories

Carnahan said he will investigate best practices for tracking and identifying missing persons who have disappeared as a result of global conflicts. Kidnapping, mass murder and imprisonment are common weapons of war, particularly in those conflicts rooted in ethnic or religious division, like the Bosnian War and the conflict in Sudan's Darfur region.

Carnahan, who has visited missing persons labs in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Cyprus, said that

aggressive efforts to identify remains or reconnect missing persons with their families can help heal emotional and psychological wounds of war.

"I've heard horrific stories from my Bosnian-American constituents in St. Louis about family members - who simply disappeared," Carnahan said. "Finding answers to what happened to their loved ones can help bring closure to the survivors of conflict and bring war criminals to justice."

Amir Karadzic and Patrick McCarthy are two St. Louisans who organized the presentation, "Prijeedor: A Voice from the Bosnian Genocide," this fall. Their exhibit on the impact of "ethnic cleansing" in the 1990's war in Bosnia and the Balkans was sited on the Meramec campus in Kirkwood in October and November.

"Obviously Rep. Carnahan is going to have a lot of issues in front of him, but it's gratifying to know that he has an interest in human rights issues in the Balkans," said McCarthy, who directs the medical center library at St. Louis University.

"Bosnia was once a great example of a multi-ethnic state that worked," said McCarthy. "Carnahan is someone who has the interest and energy to try to bring that back. I am really pleased that someone with his intelligence will be at Foreign Affairs."

"Russ Carnahan and his staff people have been great friends to the Bosnian community in South County and St. Louis City," added McCarthy. "They attend the community's events and festivals. I think there is more and more awareness that Bosnians have been a plus for St. Louis with their work ethic, their culture and in stabilizing neighborhoods in decline."

Diverse 3rd District

"The Congressman's constituency is historically rich and diverse," said Webster's George. "The growing number of Bosnians has had a positive impact on our region. And they have assisted us to understand better that part of the world."

George said it's gratifying to see Carnahan's concern for his Bosnian constituents who've come to St. Louis in recent decades. George said he hopes Carnahan can facilitate an increase in international students coming to St. Louis education centers, including Webster University.

"We have worked with the Congressman to assist qualified international students, including the Chinese, to gain entry into the U.S. to study at Webster," said George. "Ever since 9/11, appropriate restrictions for entry have unintentionally hampered the movement of qualified students to enter the U.S. for study."

"Congressman Carnahan and his staff are certainly aware of the need for international representation in our student body. He's definitely a champion of diversity of cultures learning together," George said.

Meramec's Epperson said the presence of international students helps American students

achieve what she calls "global competence."

"Global competence not only leads to understanding and a more peaceful world, it also develops individual and group skills that make U.S. citizens more competitive in the market place which is now global," she stressed.

Epperson works on student exchanges with the Midwest Institute for International and Intercultural Education.

"Our door is going to be open to Rep. Carnahan," said Epperson. "He recognizes the real imperative of international partnerships. We are always willing to share information and work in tandem with anyone in the community who recognizes the need to build global competence in our nation."

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